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THE PROGRESS OF MORALITY, RELIGION, AND LAWS,

IN THE DIFFERENT PERIODS OF THE WORLD,

EXAMINED IN

A SERMON,

Preached at the ASSIZES at READING,

BEFORE THE HONORABLE

MR. JUSTICE WILSON, AND MR. JUSTICE GROSE,

MARCH 6, 1792.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

TO

JOHN BLAGRAVE, OF CALCOT PLACE, ESQUIRE,

HIGH SHERIFF OF THE COUNTY OF BERKS,

THIS SERMON

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY HIS

FAITHFUL AND OBLIGED SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

*** *The following Diſcourſe is printed at the requeſt of the High Sheriff; but, as it was written on a ſhort notice, and in the uninterrupted courſe of profeſſional occupations, the Author has not ventured to publiſh it. He only begs to offer it to the candor of a few friends.*

Some paſſages may appear to require notes and illuſtrations. Of theſe he wiſhed to make a collection, but the copiouſneſs of the ſubject would have led him much farther than the time would permit.

BRITISH MUSEUM

MARCH 19, 1792.

HEB. vi, PART OF v. 1.

LET US GO ON UNTO PERFECTION.

IT is an arduous, and it appears an invidious, taſk, to controvert long eſtabliſhed opinions. But when thoſe opinions have a pernicious effect on the public morals, and tend to weaken the efforts to advance in religious *perfection*, it becomes the duty of a good citizen, and particularly of a Miniſter of the Goſpel, to counteract their influence. If it was thought criminal in a poliſhed ſtate of antiquity to remain neuter in civil commotions, much leſs does it become us to look with indifference on thoſe prevailing maxims, which are calculated in their effects to relax our exertions in moral and religious purſuits.

The ſubject of this remark is the opinion that the world is in a ſtate of conſtant and regular degeneracy, and that every age is inferior to the preceding in ſentiments of virtue, and in religious practice. Moraliſts have eſtabliſhed this as a principle, and religious enthuſiaſts have thrown a diſpiriting gloom over the comforts, which beamed in the pious mind. The error has become general. Naturaliſts have pretended to diſcover a gradual inferiority in the productions of the vegetable world, in the ſtature, and bodily ſtrength of man, and in the ſalutary influence of the ſeaſons. The Hiſtorian has dwelt with rapture on the ſuperior exertions of mankind in former ages in civil and heroic accompliſhments; and the man of letters has extolled the unrivalled excellence of the ancients in works of taſte and genius.

To believe that the world is in a ſtate of progreſſive improvement will animate our efforts in the purſuit of moral and religious excellence. We ſhall then, in the words of the great preacher of godlineſs, *abound more and more, provoking one another unto good works, grow in grace, and go on unto perfection.* But if we admit the diſpiriting doctrine of degeneracy, we ſhall be ſatisfied if we are not worſe than the world

world around us. And, as nothing here below is ſtationary, we ſhall ſoon relax in our activity, the deſcent will be rapid, and our *laſt ſtate ſhall be worſe than our firſt.*

To prevent this dangerous conſequence, it is neceſſary to remove the principles, which tend to produce it. It will therefore be the object of the preſent diſcourſe to trace the hiſtory of human morals and religious practice in every age, not forgetting to obſerve, in the progreſs, the connection of both with the laws and civil inſtitutions. From this inquiry, if it appears that the different periods of the world have been marked by the great Author and Reſtorer of human nature with new bleſſings, and freſh advances *to perfection*, we ſhall, I truſt, riſe from the diſcuſſion with hearts animated by gratitude, and with endeavours *to preſs towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God, in Chriſt Jeſus.*

ON the firſt inhabitants of the world it is painful to dwell. The diſobedience of our firſt parents, and the murder of Abel by his only brother, ſtain the firſt page of hiſtory. Of the

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ſtate of mankind before the deluge, it is only neceſſary to obſerve that the enormity of their ſins even forced the God of mercy to repent of the creation of the world. The forcible deſcription, which Moſes gives of the manners of the firſt ages, leads us to believe that they were guilty of exceſſes, of which ſucceeding generations have left us no example upon record. If the primitive ages have been fondly celebrated for their ſimplicity, it was becauſe the imperfection of the mechanic arts had not afforded them the means of luxurious enjoyment. The refinements of pleaſure could not exiſt in an age of ignorance: the moderation of men was the conſequence of their wants. The corruption of their manners frequently ſtaggers the belief of modern times. Without wounding your imagination with the crimes, and the fate, of the flouriſhing cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, we may obſerve that the hiſtory of Dinah offers to our view a breach of faith, of which a community has not been guilty in latter times. The trueſt feature, with which the primitive ages can be delineated, is—that they diſplayed vice in all its deformity.

LED by the hand of the Almighty, and protected from every danger by the alternate pillars of cloud and fire, which his gracious preſence raiſed before their ſteps, the Jews, it might have been ſuppoſed, would have been a pattern of moral virtue and religious obedience to ſucceeding generations. But melancholy is the deſcription, which Moſes and the Prophets have left us, of their perfidy and ingratitude. Neither the manna, which deſcended from heaven; the water, which flowed miraculouſly from the dry rock; the tide of the ſea, which ſeparated to form a paſſage for the Hebrews; nor the ſun himſelf, who ſtood ſtill to be the ſpectator, and the auxiliary, of their triumph, could ſecure their obedience to the God, who ſpoke in thunder from Mount Sinai.

It is not difficult to form a judgment of the inflexible obſtinacy, and vicious diſpoſition, of the Jews, by the ſeverity of the laws, which the wiſdom of Jehovah enacted for their government. Perhaps indeed a conjecture may be hazarded that no nation upon earth ever ſtood in greater need of the mighty arm of the ſupreme avenger, to bring them to conviction and reformation. Violators of the Sabbath, idolaters, and diſobedient children, were puniſhed with inſtant death.

Inſolvent debtors were reduced to ſlavery. Death was inflicted for offences, which, in other times and circumſtances, would have been thought venial. Yet theſe ſeverities were ſtill unable to preſerve their fidelity to their God. When unreſtrained by his viſible preſence, they corrupted themſelves, *they forſook the Lord*, and even made a golden image the object of their adoration.

The depravity of their kings, the defection of the ten tribes, and the total ruin of the nation, were the juſt chaſtiſement of their inconſtancy. Under the kings, the hiſtory of the Jews preſents the moſt horrible ſpectacles, and the moſt bloody cataſtrophes. Their iniquities at length drew the vengeance of the God of their fathers on their heads.

If ſuch was the conduct of the people of God, the object of a great diſpenſation, we muſt not expect to find a purer ſyſtem of morals among the reſt of the world. *The earth indeed was corrupt before God, it was filled with violence.* Inſtances of rude barbarity ſhock the imagination of the attentive obſerver. Such was the ferocity of their general manners, ſuch their unprincipled cruelty, that individuals were

obliged

obliged to be perpetually in a ſtate of defence. Strength of body, and bravery in battle, were the moſt deſirable accompliſhments of thoſe times. With ſome, it was the height of luxury to drink in the ſkull of a ſlaughtered foe. With others, no woman was marriageable, who had not killed an enemy with her own hand.

Man, ſenſible of his wants, is naturally religious. When the God of nature was removed from his view, the ſun and the ſtars were eaſily ſubſtituted as the objects of religious homage. Admiration and gratitude deified mortals. Animals were afterwards worſhipped: and ſuperſtitious folly terminated in the homage paid to inanimate beings. If an inviſible being was in ſome countries preſent to the eye of reaſon, fancy transformed the God of mercy into a tyrant. He was thought to be honoured moſt by the effuſion of human blood. Thus the perfection of holineſs was imagined to conſiſt in the delirious exceſſes of ſuperſtitious cruelty. Their penal laws were ſtamped with the ſame bloody ſeal. The laws of the Egyptians and Chineſe exhibited equal terrors. In ancient Gaul and Britain the common lot of criminals, or captives, was to be burnt alive on the altars of their Gods.

In this ſtate of manners we ſhall ſearch in vain for a mild ſyſtem of government. Deſpotiſm was the common form of civil conſtitution. The Aſſyrians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Elamites, felt the weight of arbitrary power. Homer himſelf appears to have no other idea of government. During all its boaſted dynaſties, China has been governed by abſolute monarchs. The ancient republics of Athens and of Rome had the ſame origin. So degraded was the mind of the Jews, that they demanded *a king to rule over them* with unbounded authority.

IT is difficult to riſe ſo far above the prejudices of education as to reprove the manners of ancient Greece and Rome. In our early youth we have imbibed, in the writers of thoſe celebrated ſtates, an admiration for the heroic deeds, which they deſcribe. Our hearts have glowed with the flame of liberty at the contemplation of a Brutus and a Leonidas. Our ſenſibilities have been awakened by the characters of an Ariſtides and a Cato; and we have formed higher conceptions of the dignity of human nature from the virtues of a Titus or an Epaminondas. But theſe are the coruſcations of meteors,

which

which only ſerve to diſplay the deep horrors of the darkneſs. The Grecian ſtates may be deſcribed as a people imperious, auſtere, and perfidious, heedleſs of the rights of nations, delighting in civil maſſacre, ſavage in their warfare, and treating their ſlaves, and their priſoners, as victims devoted to cruelty. Honeſty, wiſdom, and juſtice, had not even received a name in the ancient language of Greece. Where the tree receives ſo little culture, the fruit muſt be ſour and diſguſting.

The Roman Empire, that coloſſus, which had been formed out of the ruins of ſurrounding nations, was marked with every ſpecies of barbarity. Having no foreign enemy left to exterminate, it turned at laſt the ſword into its own boſom. Civil wars have been the curſe of every age: but the proſcriptions of Marius and Sylla are unparallelled in the annals of cruelty and revenge. The very ſports of the Romans were ſanguinary. The games, which delighted them, were not the rewards and the ſoothers of their labors, but the fruit and the aliment of their vices. They tended to familiarize the ſpectators to the blackeſt deeds of violence, and to leave in their minds impreſſions of ſavage inhumanity.

The laws of the Twelve Tables, like thoſe of Moſes, enacted the forfeit of *an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*; and, like thoſe of the Athenian Draco, might be ſaid to be written in characters of blood. It is enough to mention that the unfortunate debtor might be legally torn limb from limb to ſatisfy his unrelenting creditor.

The moral virtues of thoſe civilized nations were, in general, the effect of oſtentation; and their religion only proved the weakneſs of human reaſon, when it is unaſſiſted by revelation. Their very Deities were repreſented as giving the ſanction of example to all the vices, that degrade the human mind.

Such was the ſtate of the world. *By diſobedience all were made ſinners. All, like ſheep, had gone aſtray: they had turned every one to his evil way. All were concluded under ſin, both Jews and Gentiles; and the whole world was become guilty before God.*

But *to the Lord our God belonged mercies and forgiveneſſes, tho' they had rebelled againſt him.* The Lord ſent not

not, as in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, his angels to deſtroy, but his ſon to ſave them. *He, of whom Moſes and the Prophets wrote*, whom the Sybils themſelves foretold, *the Chriſt of God, the Wonderful, the Counſellor, the Mighty God, the Everlaſting Father, the Prince of Peace*; he, whom the heavens could ſcarce contain, bore the nature, and the infirmities of men, to *redeem them from the curſe of the law. He was wounded for the tranſgreſſions of mankind, and the Lord laid upon him the iniquities of all.* His doctrine and his example unfolded a pure ſyſtem of religion and morality; his death and his reſurrection diſcloſed the glories of a future ſtate.

The effects of this merciful diſpenſation it is eaſy to conceive. Then was perceived how dim had been *the leſſer light* of reaſon, *which ruled* the night of the heathen world, compared to *the greater light* of revelation, which now aroſe to *rule the day* of Chriſtianity. Then it was that certainty diſpelled the miſts of error, and virtue triumphed over the human paſſions, or made them ſubſervient to her intereſt; then an univerſal charity united mankind in their Saviour

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and their God, whoſe boundleſs grace and mercy were propoſed as the objects of their deſire, and the pattern of their imitation. The duties of ſociety became eſſential means of ſalvation. The religion of Jeſus gave faith its object, hope its certainty, misfortune its alleviation, virtue its reward, life its cordial, and death its comfort.

Although Cicero, and the other luminaries of the Auguſtan age, had diſplayed their abilities in illuſtrating, and exerted their virtues in exemplifying, the beauties of Roman juriſprudence; yet it was not until the Chriſtian religion had humanized the mind, that the Roman laws reached their brighteſt period. It was by ſearching the Scriptures for the pureſt principles of juſtice, that a connexion was at length effected between philoſophy and legiſlation. Chriſtianity ſhed her benign influence, though yet in an indirect manner, by the examples of patience and goodneſs, which her profeſſors diſplayed, and equally dignified the Portico and the Forum. Although the laws of the Romans, which adopted the ſpirit of thoſe of Solon, were celebrated as the moſt admirable code, that had ever proved the ingenuity of man; yet it

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muſt be acknowledged that from the ſpirit of Chriſtianity Theodoſius and Juſtinian derived thoſe principles of humanity and wiſdom, which enriched and improved thoſe laws, and made them the foundation of all ſucceeding inſtitutions. It was the effect of Chriſtianity to aboliſh the barbarous cuſtom, which permitted a parent to murder and to expoſe his child. The influence of Chriſtianity aboliſhed that odious law, eſtabliſhed by the refinement of metaphyſical ſpeculation, by which one of the parties might at pleaſure diſſolve a connubial connection, by which an injured wife might be abandoned to all the miſeries of nature and of fortune, and her innocent children left a prey to indigence and ruin. Influenced by the ſpirit of the Goſpel, the firſt Chriſtian emperor, Conſtantine, who had conquered by the Sign of the Croſs, ſet bounds to the ſupreme authority, and made the laws the ſole rule of conduct. He ſoftened the rigors of ſlavery, and moderated the ſeverity of legal puniſhment.

The beneficial effects of Chriſtianity were extended even to the calamities of war. From the time that the Goths and Vandals received the light of revelation, their morals were

purified, their hearts were humanized, and, if they ſtill perſevered in their conqueſts, and became the inſtruments in the hands of Providence to puniſh the Romans for the calamities, which they had inflicted on mankind, their victories were leſs ſullied by cruelty; their virtues were excited by the idea of a future ſtate; they learnt humility from the Goſpel, and mercy from the example of him, who with his dying breath prayed for his perſecutors, and his murderers.

The Moſaic laws were impoſed only on the Jewiſh nation, they were confined to their climate, and to their excluſive intereſt. The ſame obſervation may be made on the human inſtitutions of Confucius, Zoroaſter, Mahomet, and the Indian legiſlators on the banks of the Ganges, which, celebrated as they are by the enemies of revelation, are imperfect, intolerant, and nugatory. But the laws of the Goſpel are preſcribed to all nations, they are accommodated to all the climates of the world, and will endure to the final conſummation of all things. *Heaven and earth will paſs away, but the words of Chriſt will never paſs away.*

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But, alas! the moſt perfect ſyſtem of religion revealed from heaven will, in the practice of it, take a tincture from human infirmities. The doctrine will be perverted by prejudice, and become the inſtrument of human paſſions. In ſpite of the excellent models, which the Chriſtian religion offered to humanity, imperfections crept into its temporal conſtitution, and for a while defeated in ſome meaſure the intent of univerſal perfection, which it was calculated to produce. The divine huſbandman *had ſown good ſeed into his field*, it becomes us now to enquire *from whence tares* could ſpring. Ambition and fanaticiſm are the *enemies, that have done this.*

Senſible of the excellence and benefits of Chriſtianity, the people naturally transferred a part of their admiration to its miniſters. The clergy were invited by the emperors to take a part in the ſecular adminiſtration. Their ſuperior learning produced an implicit deference to their opinions and to their wiſhes. Their ambition increaſed with their power, and ſoon graſped the reins of univerſal dominion. The exerciſe of ſpiritual juriſdiction imbibed the ſpirit of temporal ſovereignty.

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The Popes lighted the flames of civil war, armed the ſubjects againſt their princes, and diſturbed all Europe by the thunder of their anathemas, forgetting that the *kingdom* of him, whom they pretended to repreſent, *was not of this world.*

Yet this was not the extremity of human calamities. The ſavage chieftains of the North introduced the feudal inſtitution, and added a new link to the chain of oppreſſion. The feudal ſyſtem weakened the bonds of civil union, and multiplied the principles of anarchy. Every country, a prey to deſolation and continual alarm, was covered with caſtles, conſtructed to defend the inhabitants, not againſt foreign powers, but againſt domeſtic hoſtilities. Public diſorder baniſhed from ſociety the comfort and ſecurity, which had been the great cauſes of its original inſtitution. The lower ranks of people languiſhed in a degrading vaſſallage, ſubject to the ſame fluctuation of property as the cattle in the fields. But to ſuch a depth of moral wretchedneſs were they fallen, that they appeared inſenſible of their condition, and left a melancholy proof that man loſes with his liberty the generous feelings of virtue, and the exalting energies of religion.

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The fanaticiſm of this age of ignorance was not armed with leſs violence againſt the principles of juſtice, than againſt the maxims of the Goſpel. The Inquiſition exerciſed an odious tyranny over body and ſoul. Bearing the Goſpel in one hand, and in the other the ſword of cruelty, it ſanctioned uſurpations into rights, and errors into principles. Secure in the public fear and credulity, it ſucceeded in the attempt to perpetuate deception and ignorance, in ſhutting the gates of religious knowledge on mankind. Diſtruſt and alarm gave a mortal ſtab to the peace of families. The Inquiſitors wrenched the government of the conſciences of mankind, and committed the ravages of war in the name of the God of peace. In their eyes, to be an informer was the height of virtue; imaginary or ſuſpected faults were the cauſes of apprehending, of tormenting, of murdering thouſands of innocent perſons. The moſt incredible proceſs fixed the doom of their fortune, their honor and their life. The accuſed was never confronted with his accuſer. Caught in the ſnares of a captious interrogatory, he condemned himſelf without ſuſpecting his crime, without a trial, and without an appeal. If the object of ſuſpicion diſappointed his accuſers by his firm-

neſs and reſolution, a criminal code, which makes the heart of ſenſibility ſhudder, called up the inſtruments of torture, to ſurmount his conſtancy by the apparatus of pain and agony. Stretched on the rack of torment, the hoary father, in the delirium of excruciating pangs, has delivered his only ſon, the comfort of his age; a fond huſband his beloved wife, the partner of his cares, and the ſoother of his ſorrows; as innocent victims to the cool barbarity of thoſe unfeeling wretches, who, to calculate the extremes of human ſenſibility, put nature herſelf to the torture, deaf to the voice of the God of juſtice, who has ſaid: *Vengeance is mine: I will repay.*

From ſcenes like theſe the heart of ſympathy ſhrinks with horror and diſguſt. With alacrity we turn to a brighter proſpect. Yet, while we bluſh for the failings of our anceſtors, let us expoſe the artifices of thoſe, who dare to lay them to the account of our religion. With their own weapons are the enemies of Chriſtianity repelled. It was becauſe mankind were not permitted to *ſearch the ſcriptures, which ſet before them the way of life, and the way of death, which taught them what they muſt do to inherit eternal life*, that the

the bright ſunſhine of Religion ſuffered a temporary gloom. Thoſe tranſient ſcenes of tumult, which we deplore, are only to be compared, in the great ſcale of Providence, to the ſtorm or the earthquake, which in their effects tend to purify the air, and reſtore the order of nature. And ſuch was the event. The Reformation put the book of God into the hands of mankind. Thus was happily reverſed the prohibition made to our firſt parents. The *tree of knowledge*, and *the tree of life*, were at once ſet, in all the luxuriance of the bleſſed fruit, before the world, who were invited and commanded to taſte and eat, and were aſſured that, *in the day that they eat thereof, they ſhould ſurely* live.

Then the volcano of fanaticiſm, after ſo many deſtructive eruptions, was at length extinguiſhed. The power of the Roman Pontiffs, which during ſeveral centuries had oppreſſed the Chriſtian world, had raiſed and dethroned kings at pleaſure, ſunk into the more humble, and beneficial, adviſer of lenient meaſures, and the advocate for peace. The clergy in general forſook the paths of ambition, and placed their glory in giving encouragement to the meek, redreſs to the oppreſſed, inſtruc-

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tion to the ignorant, ſupport to the fainting, and, through the promiſes of faith, pardon and grace to the ſinner.

Yet, let it be acknowledged, a few paſſing clouds have ſtill thrown a caſual gloom. In proportion as the clergy inculcated the benevolent principles of the Goſpel, a viſionary ſyſtem of metaphyſics, and a falſe philoſophy, inſidiouſly aſſuming the name of liberality and toleration, have endeavoured to undermine the foundations of Chriſtianity. The effects of this artifice have been ſorely felt in a neighbouring kingdom. From the benevolent reign of their Henry IV, the people of France enjoyed more happineſs, unallayed by the feuds of political controverſy, than any nation in Europe. In ſpite of the imperfections of their government, they were admired for their humanity, and for that gentleneſs of temper, which gives a double reliſh to the advantages, and leſſens the evils, of life. They knew comfort, becauſe they were religious.

But ſhocking is the reverſe in the preſent day. Of late a race of men has ariſen in that country, who, proud of their talents

talents and attainments, forgetting that their boaſted reaſon derived its faireſt merits from thoſe Scriptures, which they affected to ridicule, bore with impatience every ſpecies of authority, and prepared an oppoſition to their civil and religious eſtabliſhment. In the laſt reign, ſome of their chiefs, who had formed a literary connection with the great Frederic, laid before him a plan for the total overthrow of Chriſtianity. But that wiſe king, though himſelf tainted with infidelity, ſpurned a propoſal, which the experience of ages taught him would, in the downfall of the Goſpel, deſtroy the deareſt bonds of ſociety, and give a looſe to anarchy and univerſal profligacy.

The late revolution has crowned their wiſhes with ſucceſs. To augment their influence, and to realize their hopes, they repreſented the clergy and the revenues of the church as the cauſes of the public miſery. They perſuaded the people that the ſalvation of the ſtate could only be effected by the ſpoils of the church. Hence the famous decree on the civil conſtitution of the clergy, which has produced a contempt of Religion, and has left no doubt of the real deſigns of

the champions of infidelity. They knew that, if they could remove the reſpectable characters, who filled the offices of the church with a dignified beneficence, and raiſe in their room a ſet of low, unprincipled, men, their cauſe was triumphant. The contempt of the clergy is neceſſarily followed by the contempt of Religion.

Deſtructive of morals and public ſecurity will be the decrees of thoſe legiſlators, who build their laws on any foundation, but that of Religion. Pretending to equalize the advantages of birth, by removing the diſtinction between lawful and illegitimate children, they have cut aſunder the ſacred ties of the marriage ſtate. With the plea of ſecuring the rights of ſelf defence, they have bared the knife of the aſſaſſin, and legalized wilful murder.

The time cannot be far diſtant, when that people will open their eyes to their true intereſts, and adopt the ſpirit of that Goſpel, which proclaimed *Glory to God in the higheſt, on earth peace, good will toward men*; and the *fruit* of which *is in all goodneſs, righteouſneſs, and truth; love, gentleneſs, and faith.*

faith. Let it not be deemed preſumptuous, if we direct their views to the civil and religious conſtitution, which we enjoy, and to that conſequent proſperity, with which a gracious providence has bleſt us. England has had her days of fanaticiſm and anarchy. *The waves* of ſedition *have ſwelled and raged horribly; but the Lord, who dwelleth on high, hath ſtilled the madneſs of the people. He has fulfilled our deſire, and given us richly all things to enjoy.*

To the excellence of our civil conſtitution reflecting men of all nations bear the teſtimony of admiration. To thoſe, who have lately raiſed the cry of diſcontent and jealouſy againſt its principles, or its practice, it might be recommended to ſearch the annals ofmankind, and, when they have found a conſtitution with ſo few defects, let them propoſe their amendments. Perhaps it has not been ſufficiently obſerved, that a free conſtitution, compoſed of ſuch different intereſts, which, amidſt the violence of fluctuating parties, that have alternately wiſhed to raiſe or depreſs the executive branch of government, has ſtood the ſhocks of above a century, muſt be as free from imperfection, as a human ſyſtem can be made.

From

From a comparative view of all Chriſtian ſects, it may be affirmed that the Church of England builds her preſent tenets on the everlaſting rock of a Goſpel of charity. Equally diſtant from the ſuperſtition of the Church of Rome, and from the fanatic auſterity of Calviniſm, *her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace.* It has been obſerved by an eminent foreign writer, and it is an obſervation, which at this time deſerves attention, that in England the union of the civil and eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhments is conſiſtent with freedom and ſecurity.

To the bright luminaries of this country, who, animated by Chriſtian benevolence, have directed their ſtudies to the welfare of their fellow creatures, we may turn our eyes with gratitude and admiration. The miſeries of nature have been alleviated, the evils of poverty have been mitigated, or removed, by the munificence of charity. By the pious foundations of ſome exemplary characters *the hungry have been fed, the naked clothed, the lame have walked, and the blind have received their ſight.* By the humanity of one the priſoners have been viſited, and the enlivening breeze of health has baniſhed

niſhed ſickneſs and deſpair. Another has extended the benefits of charity ſchools, and, by reſcuing thouſands of neglected objects of diſtreſs from beggary and ſhame, has *ſuffered the little children to come to* their Saviour. The Philanthropic ſociety, uniting the virtues of patriotiſm with the practice of a religion of mercy, has ranſacked the dark abodes of debauchery and vice, and ſaved numbers from an ignominious end, and perhaps from the horrors of eternal death. In the number of thoſe, by whom the *Goſpel has been preached unto the poor*, we muſt not forget that zealous man, who deſcended into thoſe ſubterraneous pits, where the light of Revelation had never beamed, and *turned the hearts of the* profane *and the diſobedient to the wiſdom of the juſt*, and to the knowledge and practice of religious duties. Nor are theſe acts of goodneſs confined to our fellow ſubjects. The oppreſſed multitudes of India, and the poor untutored Africans, are embraced within the ſphere of our benevolence.

Theſe moral and religious bleſſings are nobly ſeconded by the mild character, and merciful diſpenſation, of our laws. Our legiſlators have not been dazzled by the falſe glare of

metaphyſical perfection, but guided by the experience of truth, and the acknowledged neceſſity of the redreſs of private and public wrongs. Nor ſhould we paſs unnoticed the obligation, which is due to thoſe, who are charged with the adminiſtration of juſtice. Their candor, their exalted merit, it would be flattery to praiſe, but it would be ingratitude not to acknowledge.

SUCH is the progreſs, which we have endeavoured to trace, in the Religion, the Morality, and the Laws, of mankind. Such was the darkneſs and diſorder, which prevailed in the earlier periods of hiſtory. And ſuch are the advantages, which we enjoy. It remains to enquire, *what reward we ſhall give unto the Lord for all his benefits?* The preſent imperfect diſcuſſion is not meant to encourage a vain preſumption in our ſuperior merits. We acknowledge that *we are not ſufficient of ourſelves*: we know that *our ſufficiency is of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleaſure.* But we exhort you, we entreat you, we charge you, in the name of God, and in the words of his Apoſtle, that you would *go on unto perfection.*

Let

Let each of us endeavour, in his own character, to forward that univerſal improvement in religious *perfection*, which ſeems to be the intention of infinite wiſdom; to extend the kingdom of God in the world; and to emulate each other in the practice of thoſe virtues, which Chriſt has recommended by his precepts, and ſanctified by his example. Let us, by a conſcientious reverence of the laws of the land, and a patriotic wiſh to ſupport their authority, prevent the occaſions of their ſevere exertion. This zealous ſpirit will convert envy into admiration, fraud into liberality, ſuſpicion into candor, faction into fair conſtruction, reſentment into forgiveneſs, and the paſſions of men into the virtues of angels. This aſpiration after religious *perfection* will gradually withdraw us from an immoderate attention to our terreſtrial intereſts, and their conſequent troubles; and put us in poſſeſſion of that ſerenity of temper, that patience and reſignation, which will enable us to riſe ſuperior to temptation, *to fight the good fight, and lay hold on eternal life.* So, when the king and the ſlave, the judge and the priſoner, the ſaint and the ſinner, the ſhepherd and his flock, ſhall ſtand together at the bar of almighty juſtice, at the laſt great Aſſize, which awaits all the gene-

generations of the world, we may be united to that Saviour, whoſe doctrine we have adorned, whoſe example we have imitated, and whoſe mercies we have implored. So ſhall we receive that bleſſing, which has been the object of our hopes, and the end of our virtues. So ſhall we, to complete the climax of *perfection*, be glorified in the regions of immortal happineſs, and *ſhine as the brightneſs of the firmament, and as the ſtars, for ever and ever.*

F I N I S.

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